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ABSTRACT

While self-efficacy has been described as a basic mechanism underlying arousal and performance, the hypothesis that belief of higher self-efficacy should produce lower anticipatory arousal and distress has not been proven. This study assessed perceived self-efficacy, self-report measures of fear and arousal, performance across sex, and a behavioral approach test (BAT). Undergraduates (N=51) reporting a high fear of spiders participated in the study in which 40 students used the active behavioral approach test, physically approaching the stationary fear stimulus and 11 used the passive behavioral approach test, remaining stationary but controlling the motorized approach of the fear stimulus. The results revealed that self-efficacy was a better predictor for approach behavior in the passive BAT than in the active BAT. There was a higher proportion of cowards (low self-efficacy and did not touch), phonies (high self-efficacy but did not touch), and courageous (low self-efficacy but touch) for the active BAT and more competents (high self-efficacy and touch) for the passive BAT. Females were more often cowards, phonies, or courageous while males were more often competent. Except for Touch and the self-report Fear Thermometer, significant correlations were found among the remaining dependent variables. Females reported higher fear and higher avoidance than males, while males had higher self-efficacy for the feared stimulus. (NB)

Effects of Self-Efficacy on Fear Arousal and Performance*

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PROBLEM

Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy is a unifying model whereby cognitive responses mediate action and effect. Self-efficacy has been described as a basic mechanism underlying arousal and performance. The hypothesis that belief of higher self-efficacy should produce lower anticipatory arousal and distress remains to be proved.

This study assessed perceived self-efficacy, self report measures of both fear and arousal as well as performance across sex and a behavioral approach test (active or passive).

METHOD

Fifty-one undergraduate students reporting a high fear of spiders were selected using the Fear Survey Schedule III. Forty participants (32 F & 8 M) used the active BAT while the remaining 11 students (5 F & 6 M) used the passive BAT.

Active BAT: subject physically approaches the stationary fear stimulus

Passive BAT: stationary subject controls motorized approach of the fear stimulus

Dependent measures of arousal collected:

A. Self Report (Cognitive) Measures
   1) Fear Thermometer
   2) Efficacy Index: Amount of Safety, Control, Confidence and Danger
   3) Spider Questions: Fear of Sight (SQ1 Sight) & Avoidance (SQ2 Avoid)

B. Behavioral Measure: Touch of the cage containing a tarantula

Types: self-efficacy vs. touch

Coward: low self-efficacy and did not touch
Phony: high self-efficacy but did not touch
Competent: high self-efficacy and touch
Courageous: low self-efficacy but touch

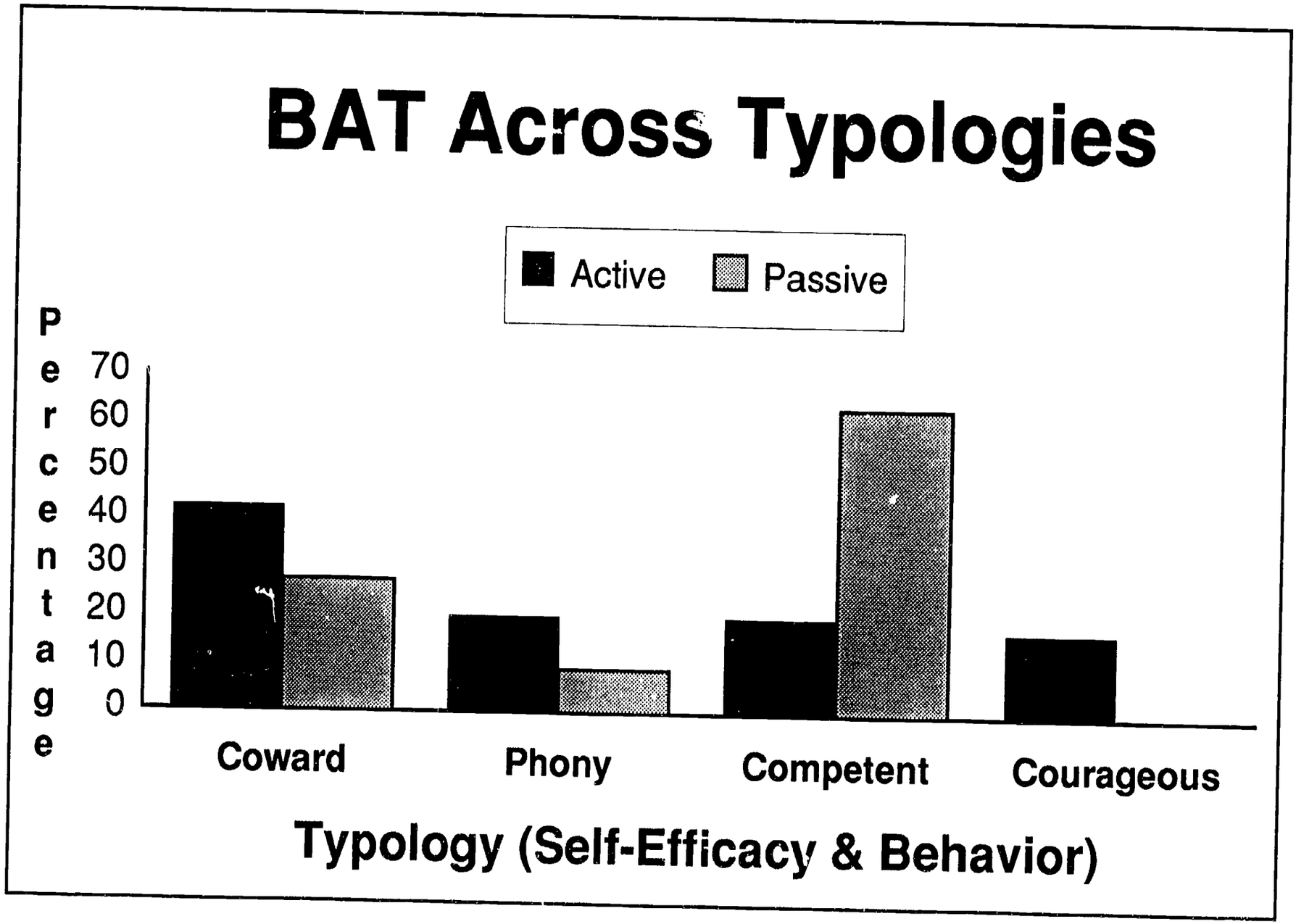
RESULTS

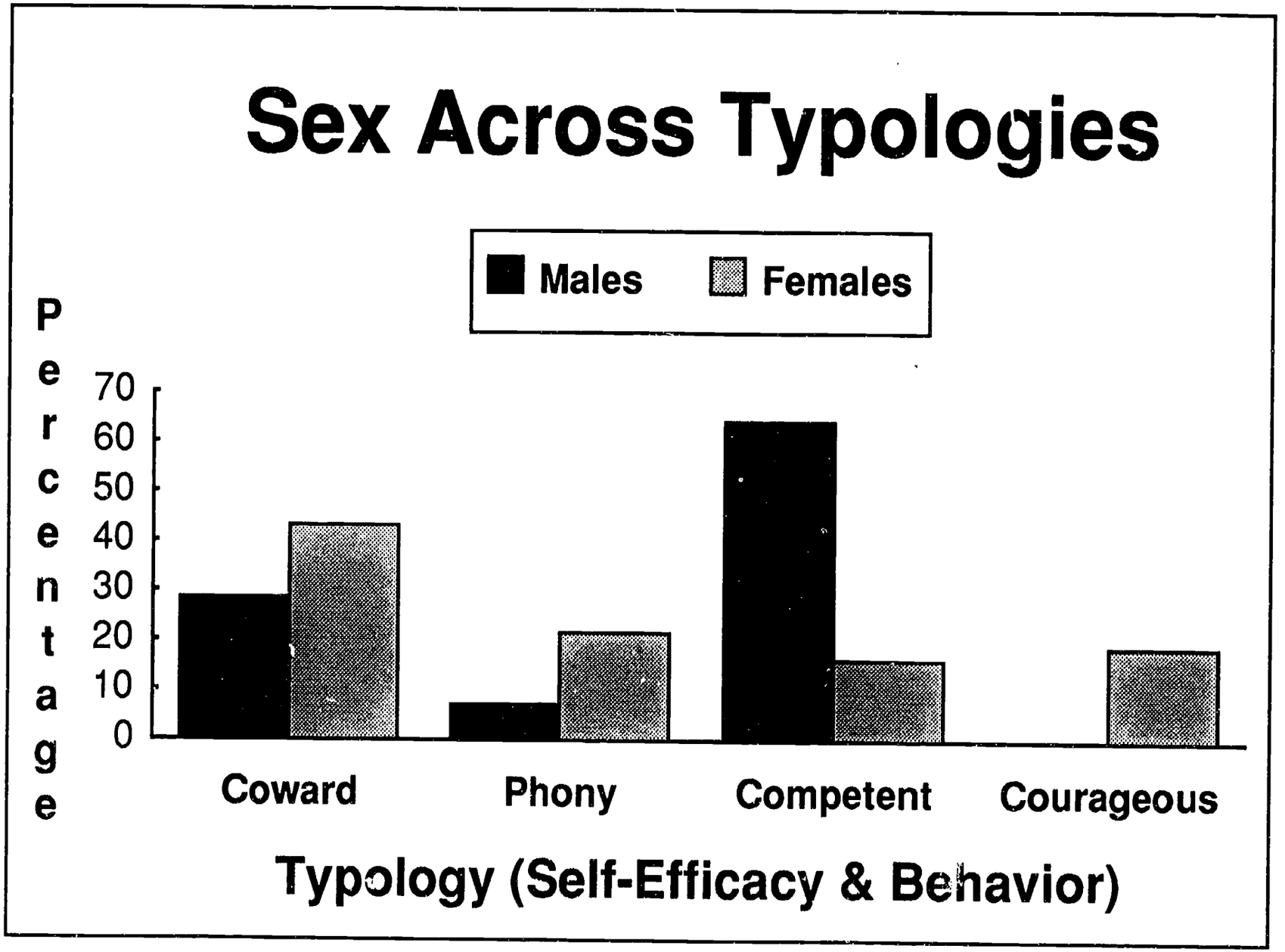
1. Self-efficacy was a better predictor for approach behavior in the Passive BAT (91%) than in the Active BAT (60%).
2. There was a higher proportion of cowards, phonies, and courageous for the Active BAT and more competents for the Passive BAT ($p = .035$).
3. Females were more often cowards, phonies or courageous while males were more often competent ($p = .006$).
4. With the exception of Touch and the Fear Thermometer, significant correlations were found among the remaining dependent variables.
5. Females reported higher fear(SQ1 Sight) and higher avoidance (SQ 2 Avoid) than males while males had higher self-efficacy for the feared stimulus.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Self-efficacy was 50% better at predicting performance when the BAT was passive. This could be the result of greater motor and/or perceived control in this measurement procedure.
2. Desynchronous responding (disagreement between self report and overt behavior) was noted for the phony and courageous types. Self-efficacy as the sole predictor of approach behavior has limitations.
3. Bandura has described fear and performance as coeffects, variables lacking a fixed relationship between them. Independence of cognitive and behavioral parameters can explain why some behave courageously, competently, cowardly or as phony in face of a threatening stimulus.

* Poster presented at the 17th Annual Convention of the Association for Behavior Analysis in Atlanta, May 26, 1991.


BAT Across Typologies
Active
Passive
Percentage
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Coward
Phony
Competent
Courageous
Typology (Self-Efficacy & Behavior)


Sex Across Typologies
Males
Females
Percentage
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Coward
Phony
Competent
Courageous
Typology (Self-Efficacy & Behavior)

CORRELATIONS: DEPENDENT VARIABLES

	T	SE	FT	SQ1	SQ2
Touch (T)	1				
Self-Efficacy (SE)	.496	1			
Fear Therm. (FT)	-.294	-.591	1		
Sight (SQ1)	-.483	-.565	.576	1	
Avoidance (SQ2)	-.422	-.465	.432	.858	1

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